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Career initiative will add to choices

Schools looking to add program that will train for advanced manufacturing

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HANCOCK COUNTY — This isn't Grandpa's idea of manufacturing, and Dad is nearing retirement. So how about it, Junior? You interested at all in learning about computers and robotics?

Those are the kinds of questions students could hear as local high schools take part in the rollout of an initiative that showcases career opportunities in advanced manufacturing.

The National Association of Manufacturers created a campaign called "Dream It Do It" after hearing its members report difficulties in finding qualified job candidates.

"It's a serious problem not just in Indiana, but nationwide," said Claudia Cummings, vice president of workforce and education at Conexus Indiana, the state's advanced manufacturing and logistics initiative. "We have a huge problem in our industries just explaining to young people what the job opportunities are."

Dream It Do It aims to get young people excited about opportunities in manufacturing; the national program is now making its way to central Indiana.

Advanced manufacturing uses technology to improve a company's efficiency. It typically involves fewer workers with a wider range of responsibilities and skill sets than those required for traditional manufacturing. It requires trained workers who can think on their feet – not the stereotypical manufacturing worker who spends an entire career tightening bolts on an assembly line.

"The era of manufacturing as our parents know it was a completely different animal than it is now," said Dan Ginther, engineering and technology teacher at New Palestine High School. "Maybe an awareness that it has changed is as important as anything."

Thousands of lucrative advanced manufacturing careers will be added in central Indiana in the coming years, industry advocates say. But will the workers be there to take them?

Traditionally strong in manufacturing, Indiana has an aging manufacturing and logistics workforce. If the state can't find younger workers to replace retiring Baby Boomers, it could miss out on a bright future for those industries, according to Conexus.

Conexus serves as Indiana's Dream It Do It affiliate and has been rolling out the program here in different regions of Indiana – most recently in central Indiana.

Ginther would like to use Dream It Do It to grow the Project Lead the Way pre-engineering program at New Palestine High School.

"I'd like to see 50 more kids," he said.

Eastern Hancock will distribute information about advanced manufacturing and logistics careers so that students are aware of the available opportunities.

Technology teacher Gary Wynn would like to build on the foundation of Greenfield-Central's Project Lead the Way program by setting up a separate academy in the coming years that would offer courses for juniors and

seniors in advanced manufacturing and logistics. The G-C school board would have to approve any new courses.

"What we're trying to do is open up some dialogue with those kids that don't have anything (careerwise) planned," Wynn said. "This is open to anybody. It's an option that we haven't had before. We're reaching out to a bigger demographic. We're trying to give kids a purpose (in their academic pursuits)."

Said Cummings of the G-C initiative: "We're very excited about the opportunities there... What's great about what we're doing is we're not working in a vacuum."

Logistics involves the transport of goods across the nation and beyond. More than 50,000 logistics workers are employed in the Indianapolis region, and Indiana ranks as the eighthlargest export state in the nation, moving \$8.76 billion in total goods, according to the Indy Partnership, a regional economic development organization. The Mt. Comfort area has emerged in recent years as a logistics hub due to its location off Interstate 70 and proximity to Mt. Comfort Airport.

Wynn would like to see G-C partner with local companies that have manufacturing operations. He'd like to set up student internships while getting an idea of what specific skills those companies need their workers to have.

"We want to help the community out because we believe in Greenfield and Hancock County," Wynn said. "We have some qualities here that could help out in creating and bringing more jobs to the community."